

Sites Homestead  
U.S. Forest Service Tract 390, east  
of State Route 28  
Mouth of Seneca  
Pendleton County  
West Virginia

HABS No. WV-61

HABS  
WVA,  
36-MOSE,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABBS  
WVA,  
36-MOSE,  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
SITES HOMESTEAD

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Location: U.S. Forest Service Tract 390,  
east of Route 28  
Mouth of Seneca  
Pendleton County  
West Virginia

USGS Onego Quadrangle, UTM: 17.641060.4299700

Present Owner: Forest Service, USDA  
Eastern Region Nine  
633 W. Wisconsin Ave.  
Milwaukee, WI 53203

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Scheduled for demolition in 1983.

Significance:

The Sites Homestead architecturally reveals the evolution of a mid-nineteenth century, one-room log structure, encased and expanded upon by a frame addition, into a two-story, frame vernacular residence or tavern. Within the frame addition, finished carpentry details such as mitered window moldings and stair corners, suggest a degree of craftsmanship above that commonly found in vernacular homes of the period and particular region.

## I. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Sites Homestead is located just north of the confluence of Seneca Creek and the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac River and west of Seneca Rocks in the Monogahela National Forest, Pendleton County, West Virginia.

The structure stands as a 2-1/2 story, four-bay, frame structure with clapboard exterior. It features a gable roof covered with standing seam tin and two stone exterior, end-wall shouldered chimneys. The structure is built on a stone foundation and measures 35' x 22'.

The condition of the structure is poor due to neglect and vandalism. Much of its architectural and structural integrity as a residence have been compromised through alterations and its subsequent use as a storage facility.

The west end of the structure, on the first floor, represents the initial, log-constructed, mid-nineteenth century residence. It features V-notched corners and hewn timbers. The chimney at this west end, clearly built in two levels, suggests the height of the original one-story chimney on the structure previous to the two story, frame addition. The chimneys are "placed by hand", the west end chimney is centered on the log structure, appearing off center on the frame structure.

The second building stage, a frame addition to the east end of the log structure resulted in the addition of a hall, living room and second floor. The entire exterior was then wood sided. At some later date the open area of the second floor was subdivided into several rooms.

The interiors throughout the frame portion feature finished carpentry detailing such as mitered window moldings, mitered risers and steps, notching of balustrades, newels and railings, hand made windows and beaded joists.

The building is vacant and deteriorated; vandalism and neglect have resulted in the loss of woodwork, exterior clapboard and architectural integrity.

## II. HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION

Settlement of the area now known as Pendleton County began during the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century and was concentrated along the forks and branches of the Potomac River. Settlers of German, Scottish, English, and Irish descent were moving into the Pendleton County communities of Fort Seybert, Franklin, Upper Tract, and Dyer, and other communities. They quickly built mills,

began clearing fields and establishing local government. In 1788, Pendleton County, which had comprised the southern half of Rockingham County, was established with an independent judicial and governance structure within the State of Virginia. During the period from 1788 to 1840, the population of the county almost doubled (Morton, 1919:96). The population in 1840 was largely rural with mercantile firms located in Franklin, Circleville, Upper Tract, on the South Fork, and Mouth of Seneca.

The mercantile store at Mouth of Seneca was run by William Adamson (Morton, 1919:99). It was about this time (1830-1840) when Jacob Sites appears to have moved to Pendleton County. At that time, Mouth of Seneca was a small community consisting of not much more than the Adamson Store and a number of farms located along Seneca Creek and the North Fork. The community was linked to Petersburg and points south by a road that paralleled the North Fork. A road or path also connected Mouth of Seneca to the nearby and similar community of Onego, up Seneca Creek.

The land in Mouth of Seneca on which the Sites Homestead was built was not patented by the State of Virginia until late 18th century (Howe and Kemp, 1983:6). While he owned land in Pendleton County earlier, it wasn't until 1839 that Jacob Sites bought the land the homestead currently is situated on. This land also included the land now occupied by the community of Seneca Rocks. A building was present somewhere on the tract of land at the time of James Sites' acquisition, but it is unclear where the structure was located. Best evidence from family tradition and records suggest that Jacob Sites moved to the site and built a single-pen log structure in the late 1830's. Jacob's second wife, Catherine, and their two sons, William and Sampson, were also with him (Howe and Kemp, 1983:12).

In 1851, Jacob Sites died leaving the homestead tract to his sons Sampson and William. At that time, William and his wife were living at the homestead, while William and his wife were living on a nearby farm, most likely south of Seneca Creek. Sampson and William continued to own the property jointly until William's death during the Civil War (Howe and Kemp, 1983:18).

During the Civil War, family tradition suggests that the homestead functioned as an inn. No documentary evidence, such as maps of the area, nor Taylor's (1975) description of the "Civil War In and About Pendleton County" supports this tradition. The war in the Seneca Rocks area consisted of a few skirmishes and troop movements (Howe and Kemp, 1983:19). In both the 1850 and 1860 census reports, William and Sampson Sites list themselves as farmers, which suggest neither considered themselves full time inn keepers or

distillers. At the time of his death in 1863, William Sites' estate appears to have consisted mostly of agricultural and single family household equipment (Howe and Kemp, 1983: 25). Additional historic documentation cited by Howe and Kemp (1983) fails to identify any documentary evidence of an inn in the Seneca Rocks area through the 19th century. It is certainly possible, however, that the Sites', from time to time, hosted travelers to the area on an informal basis, since they were centrally located near the juncture of Seneca Creek and the North Fork and close to the road from Petersburg to Riverton and points south.

After William Sites' death, the homestead property passed to his wife Dorothy, who married Henry Auvil in 1871. They appear to have moved from the homestead during the 1870's to Onego. It is during the 1870's that family tradition suggests that two doctors may have lived in the homestead. Again, the documentary record is not clear, but there is some reason to think two doctors named Poole practiced at Mouth of Seneca, though the dates are not known. The tax records of the 1870's suggest that the log cabin structure was modified to accommodate the two doctors. They did not, however, appear to remain long in the community.

By 1880, the building was occupied by John Sites, son of Sampson and nephew of William Sites, and his first wife, Belle. John and his second wife, Ellen, (married in 1905) lived in the house until John's death in 1926 and Ellen's death in 1947. Some of their children and grandchildren may have lived in the house for a few years after Ellen's death. By the time the Monongahela National Forest acquired the land from Cletus Sites (one of John's children) in 1968, the homestead was being used to store farm equipment and hay.

During the 20th century, all of the outbuildings associated with the structure were removed, some during the construction of Route 28. After acquisition by the Forest Service, the farm fences and well superstructure were removed. The Seneca Rocks Visitor Center, with parking facility and picnic area, were built adjacent to the homestead in 1973.

Despite the vagueness surrounding the various uses of the Site Homestead through time, the structure is significant for both its evolution from a single pen log structure into a two-story frame residence and its continued occupation by successive generations of the Sites family between 1836 to 1968.

Project Information:

Mitigative proposals for evaluating and resolving the adverse effects of deterioration through neglect of the Sites Homestead owned by the United States Forest Service, resulted in preparation of this documentation.

Prepared by: Barbara J. Howe, West Virginia University  
Emory L. Kemp, West Virginia University

Research Assistants: Barbara J. Dawson  
Holly L. Hoover

December 1982

A detailed topographic map of the Seneca Rocks National Monument area. The map shows various mountain peaks such as Ketterman Mountain, North Fork Mountain, and Middle Mountain. It also depicts numerous creeks and rivers, including Seneca Creek, North Fork Seneca River, and South Fork Seneca River. Key locations like Seneca Rocks, Upper Tract, and Mouth of Seneca are labeled. A prominent trail system is shown, with several points of interest marked along it. The map includes contour lines indicating elevation and a scale bar at the bottom right. The title "Vicinity Map" is located at the top center.

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This is a detailed topographic map of the Seneca Rocks area in Maryland. The map shows the Seneca Rocks National Monument, which is a large, rugged area with many peaks and ridges. Key features include the Seneca River, the North Fork Seneca River, and the South Fork Seneca River. The map also shows several towns and communities, including Seneca, Grantsville, and Grantsville. A specific 'Building Location' is marked near the mouth of Seneca Creek. The map includes various geographical features such as mountains, ridges, valleys, and creeks. It also shows a network of trails and roads. The map is titled 'Vicinity Map' and includes a scale bar and a north arrow.

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